Loss of Innocence in

*To Kill a Mockingbird*

by Harper Lee

AP Language and Composition Summer Reading Assignment

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*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is a book about loss of innocence. Jean Louise Finch, better known as Scout, is growing up in a small town that is suddenly the epicenter of racial prejudice and hatred, after a young black man is accused of raping a white girl. Scout must define good and evil for herself, and through that experience, grow into a young lady who strives to defend those who cannot defend themselves. She loses some of her own innocence along the way, but comes out ingrained with a strong sense of what is wrong and what is right as a result.

*Atticus said to Jem one day, “I’d rather you shot at tin cans in the back yard, but I know you’ll go after birds. Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit ‘em, but remember it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.”*

*That was the only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something, and I asked Miss Maudie about it.*

*“Your father’s right,” she said. “Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat up people’s gardens, don’t nest in corncribs, they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.”* (TKAM Ch. 10)

This quote relays the conversations of three different speakers. First, Atticus to Jem, then Scout as narrator, and finally Miss Maudie to Scout.

This quote represents the idea of evil’s power to destroy something that is innocent and pure. The mockingbird, a symbol of goodness and innocence with its sweet song, represents several characters throughout the book, and introduces the fragility of these characters, and the danger of being destroyed by evilness.

Atticus strives to teach his children about wrong and right, and does so through powerful analogies like this one of the mockingbird. He uses the word “sin”, which catches Scout’s attention, so much so that she consults with another adult to discover the meaning behind Atticus’s words. She takes this lesson to heart, due to her father’s word choice, and begins to understand the great power that evil can wield over good.

Scout begins to see things with a new lense, and becomes more sympathetic and understanding to the plight of innocent creatures, like Boo Radley, her mysterious reclusive neighbor next door. She also begins to view Tom Robinson as a mockingbird, innocent of the accusations against him. This new lense helps her to determine that the Ewells are bad people, set out to destroy the goodness of Tom. Scout herself begins the process of growing up, losing some of her own innocence in the process.